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Major Stephen D. Driskill, USMC

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Music is universal to every human society. Martial music has played an integral, positive role for the military. Music helps unite societies and their military forces in times of war and peace. Martial music has been used to communicate, enhance discipline, as a psychological instrument of war, to calm troops, and to improve esprit de corps. Understanding the universal, timeless nature of music generates enhanced fighting spirit for success on the battlefield.

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Marine Corps University / Command and Staff College

19b. TELEPHONE NUMBER (Include area code)  
(703) 784-3330 (Admin Office)

*United States Marine Corps  
Command and Staff College  
Marine Corps University  
2076 South Street  
Marine Corps Combat Development Command  
Quantico, Virginia 22134-5068*

**MASTER OF MILITARY STUDIES**

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**MILITARY ETHNOMUSICOLOGY:  
UNDERSTANDING THE POSITIVE IMPACT OF MUSIC ON THE UNITED STATES  
MILITARY WITHIN THE AMERICAN SOCIETY**

**SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT  
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF  
MASTER OF MILITARY STUDIES**

**MAJOR STEPHEN D. DRISKILL, USMC**

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Mentor and Oral Defense Committee Member: P. J. Otis

Approved: *Paula Otis*

Date: 22 March 2010

Oral Defense Committee Member: Dr. Edward J. Erickson

Approved: *EJ*

Date: 22 March 2010

## Executive Summary

**Title:** Military Ethnomusicology: Understanding the Positive Impact of Music on the United States Military within the American Society.

**Author:** Major Stephen D. Driskill, United States Marine Corps

**Thesis:** It is important to understand the positive impact of martial music on a society and on the military members within that society to assess and increase the fighting spirit of that society and improve our fighting capability.

**Discussion:** Music is one aspect found in every human society. Martial music has played an integral, positive role for the military throughout history. Music helps unite societies and their military forces in times of war and peace. Military forces use a specific style of music to communicate, as a training aid, and to instill a fighting spirit. The United States Marine Corps, as part of the American society, takes pride in those aspects that sharpen its history and the *esprit de corps* of all those bearing the title "Marine." The music specifically identified with the Marine Corps has historically strengthened and continues to strengthen the *élan* or fighting spirit of the Marine Corps. This thesis will focus on the positive impact military music has on a society, how martial music affects the American Armed Forces as a subset of the American society, and the role of military music within the U.S. Marine Corps. Understanding this could improve the military capability of the Marine Corps and the American military.

**Conclusion:** Understanding the universal, timeless nature of music and the positive influence martial music has within the military and their supporting civilian populations generates an enhanced fighting spirit for success on the battlefield.

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## **Preface**

This paper discusses the important impact music has on the military, and as a part of American society. I choose this topic because I enjoy music, both listening to it, and playing it (although I often just "make a joyful noise"). I appreciate firsthand the impact that music can have on individuals, on small groups, and on entire populations. I believe this is an important topic that has not received the attention it deserves.

In writing this, I would like to first thank the Lord because music is a gift and, "every good and perfect gift is from above." I would also like to Dr. Pauletta Otis for her patience, academic mentoring, support and excitement for this effort. I would especially like to thank my wife ChrisAnn and my children Joshua and Emily for their constant encouragement.

## Introduction

Music is an inseparable and unique aspect of every human society. Music is one of the very few, truly universal things common to mankind. It is one of the timeless aspects of humanity. Each society is partially defined and identified by that which it views important enough to pass along from generation to generation. Music is one aspect societies propagate to posterity. Daniel J. Levitin, a noted neuroscientist, musician, and record producer said, "Music is unusual among all human activities for both its *ubiquity* and its *antiquity*. No known human culture now or anytime in the recorded past lacked music."<sup>1</sup> Around the world and throughout time, music is part of humanity. It is as universal as the human emotions of joy, sadness, anger, love, and warfare itself. Music is one of the few human endeavors that can keep pace with the breadth and depth of emotions generated during war. While the style of music changes over time, music remains an integral part of the fabric of human lives. People relate and feel a connection to their shared music. Warfare, like music, is universal and spans the gamut of human emotion ranging from extreme euphoria and excitement, to debilitating fear, and in some cases, even deep depression.

The music of warfare thus corrals a large portion of mankind by bridging two major aspects of humanity. It is therefore important to study the impact of martial music on a society and on the military members within that society. This will improve our understanding of different societies and the spirit of their military forces.

## Definition of Music

To understand the impact music has on military forces, it is necessary to begin with a common perspective of what music entails. A random interview with ten people may elicit ten slightly different answers regarding a definition of music. Webster's Dictionary defines music as "the science or art of ordering tones or sounds in succession, in combination, and in temporal relationships to produce a composition having unity and continuity."<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, according to the Virginia Tech School of Music, music is more than simple noise; it is a medium used "to convey a message, to communicate, or to entertain."<sup>3</sup> Music can help convey a message that sparks an emotional, psychological, or physical response.

There is difference between music and noise, which is a "loud, confused, or senseless shouting or outcry; or a sound that lacks agreeable musical quality or is noticeably unpleasant; and any sound that is undesired or interferes with one's hearing of something."<sup>4</sup> This distinction from noise is what gives music importance and definition as part of any society, including the military.

Music can reinforce a mental process because it has an amazing capability to affect multiple senses simultaneously. Hearing the music audibly often accompanies feeling the music physically. Allen D. Pierce defines acoustics as, "the science of sound, including its production, transmission, and effects."<sup>5</sup> The human body's process of capturing sound waves and translating that into electrical stimuli passed and deciphered by the brain is well studied, but is only one aspect to feeling the music. Physically feeling music in other parts of the body from the sound waves produced is common and occurs at various decibel levels and octaves. Mr. Pierce goes on to say that, "The physical effects of sound on substances and bodies with which it interacts present other areas of concern and of technical application."<sup>6</sup> Physically feeling the effects of

sound is a unique experience upon the human body. The tactile sensory stimulus on the different parts of the body is unlike any other activity or motion the human body endures. It is difficult, to describe accurately or completely. Music's ability to touch both the audible and tactile senses tends to amplify its impact.

Military forces, including the U.S. military, and specifically the Marine Corps, typically have a martial or patriotic style or genre of music. Military music in the U.S. generally refers to music orchestrated, performed, or initially made popular by military bands. Francis Scala, leader of the United States Marine Corps Band from 1855-1871, mentioned that military music "divides itself fairly readily into three large groups: music for concerts, music for military formations, and music for White House functions."<sup>7</sup>

### **Military Music Influences Society**

To emphasize the overwhelming impact of music on a society, "in the fourth century B.C. the greatest philosopher Plato recommended – as Confucius had done a hundred years before him in China – that the ideal State be erected upon the foundation of music."<sup>8</sup> Reflecting the broad spectrum of human responses from musical stimuli, "Aristotle could say in *Politics*: 'The musical modes differ from one another, and those who hear them are differently affected by each. Some of them depress...others enfeeble the mind, as the 'relaxed' ones, others, again, produce a settled, moderate mode...while [some] inspires enthusiasm.'"<sup>9</sup>

To understand how martial music affects each society, and their military, it is necessary to realize where the military resides within that society. Some societies place a high premium on the importance of warfare, with those that fight in war representing the majority of that society. In other societies, the military forms a much smaller and often more isolated percentage of the overall population. Generally, democratic societies have maintained a smaller percentage of their population employed in the military forces. As such, the military forces have tended to remain distinct and separated from the majority of the society. Even among those societies with compulsory military service, there remains a fairly well defined line of demarcation between the military and civilian societies.

However, whether the military represents the bulk or a fraction of society, the universal aspect of music is present within its armed forces. Interestingly, the music associated and relating to the military often transcends the boundary between the military members and the larger society to which they belong. Such is the power of music in general.

Music is one medium that, as the historian Martin van Creveld states, "...provides a faithful mirror of a society made up of warriors, their leaders, and their retainers. This includes its likes, its dislikes, its values, the way it understood itself, and how it sought to educate its members."<sup>10</sup> The music of the overall society will influence and may become important to the members of the military forces more easily than other aspects of society such as religion, politics, or education. By understanding the roles and importance of the music of a society, it gives greater understanding to the entire society. Understanding the music of a society allows for greater knowledge of what that society holds as important, what they are willing to fight for, and therefore, how to improve in battle with or against them. The impact that music, and specifically patriotic or martial music, has on every society is important. Music encapsulates several of the driving forces that excite, motivate, and sustain the people within that society.



The enduring strength of martial music to synthesize the emotions of the people is clearly seen in the fact that the preponderance of national anthems and State songs have a martial flare. This is definitely true with the U.S. and "The Star-Spangled Banner." Even a cursory overview of our National Anthem illustrates how this music inspires and affects the American populace and especially those who have served in the military. During military indoctrination training, the details surrounding the origins of the song are emphasized and used to strengthen the commitment to something larger than the individual. The National Anthem is recognized as being part of the fiber of U.S. society, and thus representing what is worth defending.

Many Americans remember the historical significance of Francis Scott Key penning the song as a prisoner of the British during the War of 1812, and they connect the song with national achievement and resilience. "The Star-Spangled Banner" became the National Anthem, on March 3rd, 1931, "nearly 117 years after the poet had written it,"<sup>11</sup> and it continues to act as a strong catalyst for national pride. Many Americans feel a resurgence of national pride when the song is played for an American on the gold medal stand at the Olympic Games.

There is a unifying principle to the National Anthem that helps strengthen the identity and patriotism of the whole nation. Unlike a monarchy or dictatorship that has a central Figure the society can reference in their national air, John Philip Sousa stated that, "In a republic a National Anthem must come from the hearts of all the people. It must be endorsed by the universal acceptance of the people."<sup>12</sup> "The Star-Spangled Banner" truly conforms to this requirement. The song has become so ingrained as an important part of the entire society that removing it would instantly create an recognizable void.

The deep feelings that the general population of the U.S. has toward the National Anthem are mirrored and perhaps strengthened within the military. A common phrase that may ring of being a simple *cliché* found on a bumper sticker says, "For those that have fought for it, freedom has a different flavor the protected will never know." The very same thing rings true with the significance of the music of the National Anthem, stamped upon the psyche and soul of those that have served in the military. The song, like the National Ensign, almost becomes a tangible entity around which military members associate the freedoms they are willing to offer their sacrifice to defend and pass down to posterity.

"The Star-Spangled Banner" is a song recognized around the world that symbolizes and represents the U.S. John Philip Sousa accurately described the importance of the National Anthem when he said, "'The Star-Spangled Banner' makes splendid march music. No matter how many critics our anthem may have, none of them can dispute the fact that it was a very satisfactory anthem during the World War and played an enormous part in arousing enthusiasm and patriotism. It would be as easy to make a stream run uphill as to secure a new National anthem."<sup>13</sup> These patriotic feelings of endearment grow among the men and women who have answered the nation's call and willingly endured austere conditions, deployments, war, and even death while serving to "support and defend" the Nation symbolized by this song. The National Anthem influences and helps connect all Americans, including the members of the military, to the U.S. The martial music of The National Anthem helps define all of American society.

The ability of martial music to define and solidify national, patriotic fervor is often accentuated by the strident rhythms of drums intentionally inserted into military music. Often these mimic the sounds of gunfire, cannon, or explosions and seek to build upon the excitement and passion that tend to accompany a society influenced by warfare. One need look, and listen, no further than to the sixteen cannon shots deliberately and precisely orchestrated into Pyotr

Ilyich Tchaikovsky's famous piece, colloquially referred to as the "1812 Overture," as a clear example of martial flare woven into, and as part of the critical fiber of that musical score. This orchestration commemorates Russia's defense of Moscow against Napoleon's advancing *Grande Armée* at the Battle of Borodino in 1812. It is a masterful fusing of three topics that would stir the psyche and soul of Russians – the Church, the Czar, and Russian national identity.<sup>14</sup> This is just one example of the power of military music to congeal a society by weaving together the unifying emotions a society holds dear.

Coupled with the martial atmosphere generated by the musical tempo and beat, another aspect of music that routinely captures and holds the focus of the human mind is the lyrical words ascribed to the musical piece. "From time immemorial...war has also given rise to a body of poetry so vast as to almost defy the imagination."<sup>15</sup> Much of the lyrics of martial music can stand alone as poetic prose separate from the musical score it accompanies. There are lyrics "that call for war and encourage those who engage in it...there are works that celebrated victory and gloated over the enemy's defeat."<sup>16</sup> Martin van Creveld identifies the strength and enduring aspect of martial music lyrics when he quotes W.E. Henley who said that effective lyrics can be used "to set forth...the beauty and joy of living, the beauty and blessedness of death, the glory of battle and adventure, the nobility of devotion – to a cause, an ideal, a passion even."<sup>17</sup>

The human mind has a tremendous ability to immediately and often permanently capture events and store them in memory based on the stimuli those events created among the five senses. Often the catalyst for memory of certain events leans heavily, if not exclusively, on the audible nature of the event. The strength of these audible stimuli often resides in the fusing of these sounds and words together into a clearly defined song. Many people retain very detailed memories of events in their lives, which resurface instantly upon hearing a certain song or type of music. Neuroscientists continue to study this phenomenon which David Levitin summarizes saying, "A song playing comprises a very specific and vivid set of memory cues...the music that you have listened to at various times in your life is cross-coded with the events of those times. That is, the music is linked to events of the time, and those events are linked to the music...as soon as we hear a song that we haven't heard since a particular time in our lives, the floodgates of memory open and we're immersed in memories. The song has acted as a unique cue, a key unlocking all the experiences associated with the memory for that song, its time and place."<sup>18</sup>

During times of war, the symbiotic relationship between the separate military community and the larger supporting civilian society is crucial. Without the popular support from the society, military success is extremely difficult, if not impossible. Music often transcends the dividing gap between the military and the civilian population that must support the military. How a society responds to pieces of music provides more clarity to better understand and comprehend the powerful impact that music wields.

Throughout the history of the U.S., martial music has acted as a distinct clarion call to rally necessary support for war. Looking at three notable "wartime" songs as part of U.S. history gives an indication of the impact that martial music plays on strengthening the bonds of support between fighting forces and their supporting civilian societies. "Dixie," "The Battle Hymn of the Republic," and "Over There" have remained ingrained within the core of U.S. society.

The American Civil War redefined how Americans viewed their country. As the prestigious Civil War historian, James M. McPherson wrote, "Before 1861 the two words 'United States' were generally rendered as a plural noun: 'The United States *are* a republic.',"<sup>19</sup> afterwards it became "The United States *is*..." During these four years, as expected, music played a crucial

role in generating and maintaining public support for the war. Daniel Decatur Emmett's "Dixie" and Julia Ward Howe's "The Battle Hymn of the Republic" exemplifies what is arguably the pinnacle of martial music "during the nineteenth century, when it joined forces with nationalism."<sup>20</sup> The striking musical scores and impassioned lyrics immediately and resoundingly hit a chord with the U.S. population, both in uniform and out. Combining the militaristic tempo, rhythm, and contour (which describes the overall shape of a melody, taking into account whether a note or phrase goes "up" and "down"), with the stirring patriotic lyrics spliced with religious overtones helps account for the instantaneous acceptance. These songs merged the primary topics that Americans have always held dear and central as a society.

Another example of music bridging the dividing line between the U.S. society and the distinct military is with George M. Cohan's song, "Over There." This song illustrates how music can act as a solidifying force linking the military with the larger society. When George M. Cohan composed this song on a train from New Rochelle to New York shortly after the U.S. declared war on Germany in 1917,<sup>21</sup> the music became an effective "rally around the flag" tune that helped sway public opinion towards actively supporting military involvement in World War I. Upon the laurels of this song, Americans experienced an emotional and mental shift from an isolationist mentality towards a national focus and willingness to shoulder the responsibility of helping to win the war for the Allied cause. The enduring legacy of these songs illustrates that military music is a valid medium to capture and strengthen deep feelings of patriotism, pride, unity, and camaraderie within a society.

### **The Roles of Music within the Military**

Music directly influences the U.S. Marine Corps, which forms a distinct entity within the U.S. military and the American society. Throughout history, martial music has served, and continues to serve many functions within the military. Music has acted as a method of communication, an aid to enhance discipline and training, as a psychological instrument of war, and to calm troops after battle. Additionally, the U.S. military, and specifically the U.S. Marine Corps, makes a concerted effort to strengthen the fighting spirit or *esprit de corps* by emphasizing the history, pageantry, and tradition unique to the Corps. Military music plays an instrumental part of building and maintaining the *élan*, for which the Marine Corps is famous. Recognizing how martial music influences the military, and specifically, the Marines, provides a greater understanding of our allies, our enemies, and ourselves. Martial music helps maximize and enhance the development of the fighting spirit required for success on the battlefield.

Music has played several different roles within military societies. One of the most recognizable is as a means of communication. Throughout history, one of the common threads of war is that it is chaotic and full of noise that is more often than not, deafening. To communicate amid the din and clamor of the battlefield, militaries have used music. This has ranged from simple trumpet or bugle calls, to various rhythms and sounds produced on single drums, to full military bands employed as a measure attempting to overpower the sounds of the battle and communicate commands to the various soldiers around the battlefield. The distinctive snap of a drum roll delivered aboard ships and within land armies issued a clear signal to "beat to quarters."

In an attempt to add clarity and order to the confusion, chaos, and noise of battle, militaries used music to enhance the discipline of their men. This was especially true during the

infancy of the U.S. military. During the Revolutionary War, there was a need to instill a greater sense of military discipline within the ranks of the U.S. military. William Carter White, a leading music historian, identified the positive influence music played on the American military when he said, "The martial music which early inspired the Colonial militiamen to deeds of valor emanated from the fife and drum... The popularity of the fife and drum, made readily apparent by the favorable reaction of these early manifestations on morale of the first soldiers of the Continental Army, seems to have stamped upon the consciousness of the U.S. military leaders a real need for music of some sort to assist in maintaining discipline and efficiency among the troops."<sup>22</sup>

Additionally the U.S. military, like several other militaries at the time, attempted to enhance the positive impact martial music played on unit discipline by developing and issuing strict arrangements for the positioning of military bands and the timing of routine military band signals. For instance, the Valley Forge Orderly Book of General George Weedon of 1778 stated:

"In future reveille will beat at day break; the troop at eight in the morning; the retreat at sunset, and taptoo at nine in the evening. To render this duty uniform, the drummer's call will beat at the right of the first line and be answered throughout that line; then through the second, and the corps of artillery beginning at the left; the reserve shall follow the second line. Immediately after this three drum rolls will begin and run through in like manner as the call. Then all the drums of the army at the heads of their respective corps shall go through the regular beats, ceasing upon the right which will be a sign for the whole to cease."<sup>23</sup>

Music and musical instruments provide a punctuating clarity necessary on the battlefield as well as within garrison. From antiquity, success on the battlefield was more readily and routinely obtained from preparatory training conducted off the battlefield. The same strengths music plays on the battlefield translate into strengths for effective training. Thus, martial music has remained effective as a tool to assist in drilling the repetitive motions in training, which translate into improved military discipline and efficiency on the battlefield. The defined and calculated tempo of military music assists in teaching, refining, and perfecting the coordinated actions required for military marching. Marching in time helps generate uniform pace distances. By instructing and reinforcing the habit pattern of marching at a uniform pace and with a uniform stride distance, it actually assists in moving larger numbers of men a greater distance, quicker. By reducing the accordion effect from slowing, stopping, starting, or accelerating in the march tempo, it actually eases the physical stress placed on the human body conserving energy and allowing armies to cover even greater distances and carry added weight.

Marching in time also helps to orchestrate unified movements and cohesion on the battlefield. This was especially true and necessary when militaries relied more heavily on very closely massed formations to maximize the effectiveness of their weapons. This requirement for extremely precise and metric movements was critical for millennia until the technological advances in weaponry dictated increasing dispersion among individual soldiers. The rhythmic drum cadences, often with accented beats or defined pauses, still assist in developing the timing necessary for unit marching.

In addition to acting as methods of communication, martial music and musical instruments have also elicited powerful psychological effects on the battlefield. This is due largely in how

the human brain synthesizes music. Daniel Levitin highlights recent scientific research stating that, "Contrary to the old, simplistic notion that art and music are processed in the right hemisphere of our brains, with language and mathematics in the left, recent findings...are showing us that music is distributed throughout the brain...Music listening, performance, and composition engage nearly every area of the brain that we have so far identified, and involve nearly every neural subsystem."<sup>24</sup> The fact that music is synthesized throughout the brain rather than within a specific, focused part of the brain helps illustrate how music can influence all aspects of human life, and specifically how military music can help generate psychological effects on the battlefield.

History is replete with examples of music playing a key and often decisive psychological role on the battlefield. Gideon's use of ram's horn trumpets as the principle weapon against the Midianite camp is a powerful example of the surprise, confusion, and psychological impact music can have on the battlefield.<sup>25</sup> The psychological power martial music can impart upon the military is also evident as "American veterans of the Korean War harbor haunting memories of Chinese bugle calls resounding through the hills to herald their assaults."<sup>26</sup>

Additionally, one of the most ancient musical instruments still in use today, the bagpipe, has effectively and routinely invoked strong psychological responses ranging from fear among adversaries to hope and reassurance among allies. "The notes of the pipes have a shrill and penetrating quality that can be heard at distances up to nine miles, and are not easily drowned out even by the sounds of battle. Compared to the instruments they replaced on the battlefield—trumpets, horns, and harps—the bagpipes have a more warlike, aggressive sound. As a result of their chilling effect on opposing troops, bagpipes were the favorites of generals everywhere, and Egyptians, Greeks, and Romans all led troops into battle to the wailing skirl of the pipes."<sup>27</sup> In 1746, an English court identified the close association of bagpipes with military forces stating, "No Highland regiment ever marched without a piper and therefore his bagpipes in the eyes of the law, was an instrument of warfare."<sup>28</sup> The bagpipes remain a powerful example of a specific instrument that, throughout history, has demonstrated a psychological impact on the battlefield.

In addition to the psychological impact music plays on the battlefield, music can have a calming effect. Music has close connections with the physical and emotional stirring towards war, but it also capable of transferring a sense of peace to an individual and towards an entire community. Music can often have a calming effect on individuals and on all of the people within a society. "Aristotle...in agreement with modern healing methods, related that persons in religious frenzy or otherwise insanely overwrought could be brought back to themselves again by carefully chosen melodies."<sup>29</sup> The origin of "Taps" illustrates one of the greatest examples of the simple elegance of peace that military music can portray.

In his history of "Taps," Richard Schneider says, the story behind the song "...begins in a spirit of deep compassion during one of the darkest nights of the war. From its creation, 'Taps' flew throughout our nation on the wings of intense human emotion to become the indelible twenty-four notes in our nation's music that it is today. It is a song with a soul to which every heart responds. During its 140 years with us, it has accumulated its own lore and legends... 'Taps' continues to resonate in America hearts, here and around the world, to this day."<sup>30</sup> "Taps" is one powerful example of how military music remains directly connected with other strong emotions. It remains one of the most recognizable songs within the military music genre, originally written and still played to stir emotions of peace and tranquility.

Understanding the history behind this specific song helps illuminate the continued passion and aurora it has over Americans, and specifically within the U.S. Marine Corps. The song was arranged following the battles associated with “the Peninsular Campaign,” the Union Army’s campaign under George B. McClellan in 1862 to capture Richmond. During this campaign, the “furious fighting culminated in the famed Seven Days Battles, waged June 26 to July 1 between McClellan and General Robert E. Lee...The ever-cautious McClellan withdrew south, down to Harrison’s Landing at Berkeley Plantation on the James River, where Union gunboats provided relative safety.”<sup>31</sup>

Suffering from personal wounds sustained during the Seven Days Battles, Brigadier General Daniel Adams Butterfield, commander of the Third Brigade of the Fifth Army Corps, was sitting in his tent expecting the bugle signal “extinguish lights” to sound the end of the day. General Butterfield, “was a fair bugler himself, had already composed several other calls, including a signal for troops to advance, to halt, to lie prone, and to charge.”<sup>32</sup> He shared the impression with many men of the Union army who felt that the regulation tune at that time “was colorless and harsh, not at all soothing.”<sup>33</sup> He summoned the brigade bugler, twenty-three-year-old Private Oliver Wilcox Norton, to his tent and said that the soldiers needed something to comfort them and calm them on that hot July night. After the battles, the withdrawal, and amid the conditions of the Union camp at Harrison’s Landing, General Butterfield understood the calming power of music, and sought to harness this with a revised tune that would signal the close of another hard day. Private Norton later wrote of the genesis of the song, which rapidly penetrated into the very core of the U.S. military and American society itself in a letter:

“General Daniel Butterfield...showing me some notes on a staff written in pencil on the back of an envelope, asked me to sound them on my bugle. I did this several times, playing the music as written. He changed it somewhat, lengthen some notes and shortening others, but retaining the melody as he first gave it to me. After getting it to his satisfaction, he directed me to sound that call for ‘Taps’ thereafter in place of the regulation call. The music was beautiful on that still summer night, and was heard far beyond the limits of our brigade. The next day I was visited by several buglers from neighboring brigades, asking for copies of the music, which I gladly furnished. I think no general order was issued from army headquarters authorizing the substitution of this for the regulation call, but as each brigade commander exercised his own discretion in such minor matters, the call was gradually taken up through the Army of the Potomac. I have been told that it was carried to the Western Armies by the 11th and 12th Corps, when they went to Chattanooga in the fall of 1863, and rapidly made its way through those armies.”<sup>34</sup>

Since that time, playing the song “Taps” has become the accepted standard with the retiring of the National Colors on military posts, bases, and aboard ships. General Butterfield and Private Norton succeeded in arranging a song that has remained uniquely powerful and appreciated, by those in the U.S. military, as a calming, peaceful end to the day within the military society.

Oliver Norton returned to the Gettysburg Battlefield in 1880 to dedicate the regimental monument and take part in the annual reunion of battle’s survivors, (of which he was one having served under Col Vincent of the 83rd Pennsylvania in the defense of Little Round Top), and



“reported that, while standing on the rocks of Little Round Top, he sounded the old Dan Butterfield call with his battered wartime bugle. ‘When the bugle sounded...a great shout came up from the men...They came charging up to the spot where I stood, some with tears in their eyes, asking to have it repeated...That familiar sound echoing among the rocks where they had fought...brought back, perhaps more vividly than words could do, the memories of the days when they had answered so often to its sound.”<sup>35</sup>

In World War I, a soldier wrote of the timeless emotional and physical connections to “Taps” felt by all of have “stood the watch” within the U.S. military. These same strong emotions have been reported hundreds, if not thousands, of times within the members of the U.S. military directly relating to the playing of “Taps.”

“‘Call to Quarters’ blows, and soon ‘Taps’ will lay us to rest for this day. As surely as the bugle calls of the day (save ‘Mess Call’ and ‘Pay Call’) are to be damned, those of the night are to be blessed. Particularly, ‘Taps.’ No matter how a man wearies of this army, here is one call he wouldn’t mind hearing every night of his life through. It seems to us something more than beautiful music. In a way it symbolizes and humanizes this army that rides your neck all day, whispering at night that, after all, the army wishes you well, and that it’s all for the good of the service...The grind, the disgust, the oath, the spur – these it obliterates, saying all our prayers for us and sending us quietly to sleep, better ready for another day.”<sup>36</sup>

However, this song has arguably become more emotionally connected with the somber ceremonies associated with military funerals. The clear, mellow notes ringing in conjunction with formal military honors, including a gun salute, sound true and drive the memory further into the collective conscience of military personnel. This song still evokes feelings of calm, peace, and serenity as members pause to reflect upon, honor, and remember their fallen comrades. Members of the military harbor a real and tangible understanding that, “Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.”<sup>37</sup> Paying final respects at military funerals accompanied by “Taps” is a clear reminder of the brotherhood and love developed between those that fight and die together. Several versions of lyrics to the tune have arisen. Each of these versions contains lyrics composed of words associated with tranquility and peace at the end of the day. However, “Taps” is overwhelmingly remembered fondly for the tune, the history surrounding it, and the memories associated with it, rather than for the lyrics. “Taps,” represents how martial music can help unite and calm Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen, and Marines.

While militaries have used music to communicate, to generate a psychological response, and to calm and unite, music's role in building and maintaining the fighting spirit or *élan* of a military force has remained and possibly even gained strength. The role of music as a method to help convey the uniqueness, brotherhood, and *esprit de corps* within the Marine Corps is well suited. Music and specifically, military or martial music often includes a meter, tone, and structure that are easily identifiable, and memorable. Because of this, music is readily associated with the martial spirit expected within the military. As such, martial music is a lynchpin in the current pageantry, history, and ceremony of the U.S. Marine Corps, significantly contributing to the *esprit de corps* of the individual Marine and the entire Marine Corps.

Military forces readily use music to build upon the martial spirit perceived as necessary to generate success on the battlefield. Because the nature of war is so different from any other human endeavor, a different psychological process is needed to survive, and even more so, to succeed in war than in peace. It is this difference in thought process that often separates the

military from civilian societies. To bridge this line, the military has developed a well-defined and successful indoctrination program to train and transform new civilian recruits into military men and women. In essence, the military training programs attempt to adjust the human body to the physical differences between civilian and military life. Additionally, these training programs attempt to adjust the psychological process and infuse the recruits and officers with a fighting spirit. Military music is a very powerful reinforcement and embodiment of the *élan* required in war.

In battle, when the chaos of war surrounds and threatens to overwhelm men and women, the actions of individual men often break down to the lowest common denominator. Men and women act and react to perform necessary deeds not for high strategy, or ideals, or purposes, but rather to protect and fight for the man to the left and the man to the right. This brotherhood of war is often attributed to the fact of shared tribulation, shared experiences, shared fears, and shared memories. At this basic, elementary level, music plays a key role. Many times in battle, the recollection of these shared memories, strengthened from military music, provides the anchor that *esprit de corps*, or a fighting spirit, clings to and steadies that person to complete the necessary task.

Individual Marines often fight for the men immediately beside them because those men are Marines. The title is earned and not just given; and it is the shared experience of boot camp, or The Basic School that forms this unbreakable bond of brotherhood. Interestingly, martial and patriotic music forms a substantial portion of that shared experience among Marines. During these transformational courses, when citizens change into Marines, military music is a key part of the shared experiences. Throughout every day, martial music is infused into the training. From the first sounds of “Reveille” in the morning to the playing of “Taps” at night, martial music is a shared aspect that measures off the training each day and adds to the communal experience, and thus the *élan* developed during the military transformation.

### **The Impact of “The Marines’ Hymn”**

“The Marines’ Hymn” may present the biggest musical influence on the *esprit de corps* felt by all those who have earned the title, Marine. Like a large percentage of military music, “The Marines’ Hymn” was written during the nineteenth century when many of the catalysts leading to memorable songs rose up together to form a wonderful symbiotic balance. These catalysts included religion, militaristic pride, and rising nationalism. The Marine Corps attempts to pass along the *esprit de corps* to everyone earning the title, Marine. One way to instill Marines with the *esprit de corps* is with the great steps taken to immortalize their history. Perhaps due to the smaller size compared to the other military Services of the U.S., the Marine Corps has prided itself on transferring the legacy of its military exploits to each new recruit and candidate. From individual details within the uniform, like the quatrefoil on all Marine officer uniform covers, and the red “blood stripes” emblazoned upon the dress trousers of all non-commissioned officers and commissioned officers, often Marines appear to take a hyperactive approach to passing the history of the Corps to the next generation of Marines. “The Marines’ Hymn” is a revered medium to help propitiate the Marine Corps legacy.

The exact date for arranging the original version of “The Marines’ Hymn” is unclear. However, records indicate that the song was popular by the U.S. Civil War.<sup>38</sup> Walter F. Smith, the second leader of the Marine Band, responded to an inquiry as to the origins of the song when



he said, "The air of the Marine [sic] Hymn is certainly to be found in the opera, 'Genevieve de Brambant'...the melody is not in the exact form of the Marine [sic] Hymn but is undoubtedly the air from which it was taken. I am informed however, by one of the members of the band, who has a Spanish wife, that the air was one familiar to her childhood and it may, therefore, be a Spanish folk song."<sup>39</sup> Joel D. Thacker traced the history of "The Marines' Hymn" and reiterated that the tune which formed its foundation originated "from an opera-bouffe (a farcial [sic] form of opera, generally termed musical comedy) composed by Jacques Offenbach (1819-1880), and occurs as a duet by two comedians in 'Genevieve de Brambant,' which was first presented at the Theatre de Bouffes Parisiens, Paris, on November 19, 1859."<sup>40</sup> While the tune of this military music originated amid a comedy, the translation of this song and the pride it generates in Marines is anything but comical.

Like "The National Anthem," the enduring strength of "The Marines' Hymn" lies not just in the air but also within the stirring balance of tune and lyrics. These lyrics succinctly capture the honorable fighting history of the Marine Corps. Each line of the song captures a portion of the tradition and legacy of the Corps. The song begins by recounting, two of the early victories that encapsulated the fighting qualities of the Marine Corps. "From the Halls of Montezuma" tugs at the strings of pride for combat effectiveness and heroism during the Mexican War of 1847. U.S. forces under General Winfield Scott had battled across Mexico towards Mexico City. A former palace on the hill called Chapultepec overlooking the causeways into the city barred the assault on the city. On September 13th, Marines and Soldiers stormed this defensive position suffering significant casualties. "Indicative of the Marine battalion's performance was the fact that 13 of the 23 Marine officers present at Chapultepec received brevets for bravery."<sup>41</sup> Following a hectic battle, the Americans stormed into the city, raced through the crowded streets into the Grand Plaza, and took the Mexican National Plaza, before which stood the Halls of Montezuma. After securing the palace, General Scott found the streets guarded by U.S. Marines when he marched into the city.<sup>42</sup> This battle demonstrated the tenacity and courage of Marines in the face of formidable enemy defenses.

"The Marine's Hymn" continues with a phrase that outlines the boldness and innovativeness common throughout the annals of Marine Corps battle history. "To the Shores of Tripoli" is a telling reminder of the audacious military action in 1805 lead by Pressley O'Bannon, who along with an expeditionary force of Marines, crossed over 600 miles of Libyan desert to assault and seize the city of Derna and rescue the kidnapped crew of the U.S.S *Philadelphia*.<sup>43</sup> This successful military operation is still recognized, studied, held in high esteem, and remembered as one of the founding bedrock operations that helped to solidify the fighting spirit of the Marine Corps that remains a hallmark of the Corps to this day.

The song continues with each line reaffirming a principle cherished and respected within the Marine Corps. "We will fight our Country's battles" carries with it one of the enduring slogans of the Corps, "to be most ready when the Nation is least ready." The concept of the MAGTF and successful integration of combined arms is presented with the phrase, "in the Air, on Land, and Sea." Marines take pride in being the "first to fight for Right and Freedom," and when fighting, to do so in such a way that will "keep our honor clean." Marines "are proud to claim the title of United States Marine," and recognize that being a Marine is earned and not just given. The dedication to upholding the history and legacy of the Marine Corps is one of the bedrock principles directly strengthened by all three stanzas of "The Marines' Hymn."

The impact that this song has on the pride and *esprit de corps* physically manifests itself in the fact that Marines, of all ages, will stand with respect whenever they hear this song. This song continues to establish such a strong connection that many Marines will experience a physical response in the form of getting goose bumps or shivering, despite the temperature, whenever they hear the song. Perhaps one of the greatest tributes to the *esprit de corps* generated among Marines by this song was first published during World War I, on August 16, 1918. It remains applicable to this day:

“A wounded officer from among the gallant French lancers had just been carried into a Yankee field hospital to have his dressing changed. He was full of compliments and curiosity about the dashing contingent that had fought at his regiment’s left. ‘A lot of them are mounted troops by this time,’ he explained, ‘for when our men would be shot from their horses, these youngsters would give one running jump and gallop ahead as cavalry. I believe they are soldiers from Montezuma. At least, when they advanced this morning, they were all singing From the Halls of Montezuma to the Shores of Tripoli!’”

An individual Marine's emotional, psychological, and often physical response helps illustrate how this martial music can act as the one of the principle driving factors for increasing the *esprit de corps* within a military unit.

## Summary

The impact that martial music has played upon the American people is unmistakable. The fact that these songs have remained popular since their first release signifies the enduring influence that music can have on uniting the society. By generating a unified popular support for the military society in times of war, music has demonstrated the positive effect it can have on successful military operations. Military music directly helps provide a bridge between the distinct military forces and the overall society. When the military is clearly able to draw strength from an encouraging society, the fighting spirit of the men and women in uniform increases.

The United States has always desired to have a clear separation between the military Services and the civilian society. Recognizing that success on the battlefield is often predicated on a disciplined and trained military with the necessary fighting spirit, it is important to understand what contributes to improving these attributes within military forces. Whether music was used as a form of communication amid the chaos and friction of the battlefield, or to generate and facilitate precise movement of men, or to ceremonially commemorate and provide emotional and psychological stillness following battle, or to rally the emotional and physical energies of a nation, military music has positively influenced society. Music, and specifically martial music, resonates with the members of the military and provides a unique role in transforming ordinary citizens into Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen and Marines.

Understanding the positive role that music has played in the past, and will continue to play in the future, provides a greater knowledge of ourselves. The adage attributed to Sun Tzu that military success comes from knowing the enemy and knowing yourself, should include an understanding of the role of music within the military and their supporting civilian populations. Understanding the universal, timeless nature of music, increases the appreciation for how music forms a central part of what a society holds dear. This in turn helps identify what may motivate a society to conduct war, what principles it will defend, and even how they may generate the *élan*

within their military. Military music unites, inspires, and improves the fighting spirit required for success on the battlefield.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Daniel J. Levitin, *This is Your Brain on Music: The Science of a Human Obsession* (New York: Penguin Group, 2007), 5.

<sup>2</sup> Merriam-Webster Dictionary, s.v. "music." <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/Music> (accessed December 17, 2009).

<sup>3</sup> Virginia Tech University, Music Department, <http://www.music.vt.edu/musicdictionary/> (accessed December 17, 2009).

<sup>4</sup> Merriam-Webster Dictionary, s.v. "music." <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/noise> (accessed December 17, 2009).

<sup>5</sup> Allan D. Pierce, *Acoustics: An Introduction to Its Physical Principles and Applications* (Melville: The Acoustical Society of America, 1989), 1.

<sup>6</sup> Pierce, 2.

<sup>7</sup> David M. Ingalls, "Francis Scala: Leader of the Marine Band from 1855-1871," (Masters Thesis, Graduate School of Arts and sciences of the Catholic University of America, 1957), 132.

<sup>8</sup> Curt Sachs, *Our Musical Heritage, a Short History of Music* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1955), 24.

<sup>9</sup> Sachs, 25.

<sup>10</sup> Martin van Creveld, *The Culture of War* (New York: Presido Press-Random House, Inc., 2008), 191.

<sup>11</sup> Edward S. Delaplaine, *John Philip Sousa and The National Anthem* (Frederick: Great Southern Press, 1983), 83

<sup>12</sup> Delaplaine, 65.

<sup>13</sup> Delaplaine, 78-79.

<sup>14</sup> Roger Lax; Frederick Smith, *The Great Song Thesaurus* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 230.

<sup>15</sup> Crevald, 197.

<sup>16</sup> Crevald, 197-198.

<sup>17</sup> Crevald, 197. Quoted from W.E. Henley, ed., *Lyra Heroica* (London: Macmillian, 1936), vii.

<sup>18</sup> Levitin, 166.

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<sup>19</sup> James M. McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom – The Civil War Era* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 859.

<sup>20</sup> Crevel, 197.

<sup>21</sup> A Multimedia history of World War One, Vintage Audio - Over There  
<http://www.firstworldwar.com/audio/overthere.htm> (accessed January 12, 2010).

<sup>22</sup> William Carter White, *A History of Military Music in America* (New York: The Exposition Press, 1944), 20

<sup>23</sup> White, 20.

<sup>24</sup> Levitin, 8-9.

<sup>25</sup> Judges Chapter 7.

<sup>26</sup> "In war, music can have powerful and unexpected psychological effects." *Military History* 22, no. 3 (June 2005): 6. <http://search.ebscohost.com/>.

<sup>27</sup> Great Highland Bagpipe History at Celtic Instruments.com, <http://www.celtic-instruments.com/pipes/great-highland-bagpipes/history.html> (accessed January 6, 2010).

<sup>28</sup> Scotia Pipers – Bagpipes History, <http://www.scotiapipers.co.uk/history.htm> (accessed January 19, 2010).

<sup>29</sup> Sachs, 24.

<sup>30</sup> Richard H. Schneider, *Taps: Notes from a Nation's Heart* (New York: William Morrow-Harper Collins Publishers, 2002), 2.

<sup>31</sup> Schneider, 6.

<sup>32</sup> Schneider, 33.

<sup>33</sup> Schneider, 9.

<sup>34</sup> Schneider, 11.

<sup>35</sup> Schneider, 42.

<sup>36</sup> Scheinder, 59.

<sup>37</sup> John 15:13, *The King James Bible*.

<sup>38</sup> Joel D. Thacker, *History of the U.S. Marine Corps Hymn* (Quantico: U.S. Marine Corps Historical Division, 1950), 1.

<sup>39</sup> Thacker, 1.

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<sup>40</sup> Thacker, 2.

<sup>41</sup> Paul L. Stokes, *"From the Halls of Montezuma" - A Short Journey with the U.S. Marines, 1779-1938*, 4th ed. (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2007), 13.

<sup>42</sup> Don Burzynski, comment on "Marines take historic Halls of Montezuma," Leatherneck.com posted January 16, 2006, <http://www.leatherneck.com/forums/showthread.php?t=25105> (accessed January 9, 2010).

<sup>43</sup> The 1805: The Battle of Derna "To the shores of Tripoli" [http://www.marines.com/main/index/winning\\_battles/history/missions/battle\\_of\\_derna](http://www.marines.com/main/index/winning_battles/history/missions/battle_of_derna) (accessed January 12, 2010).

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